

8. A POSSIBLE RANGE EXTENSION OF HORSFIELD'S GOSHAWK *ACCIPITER SOLOENSIS* IN INDIA

A Horsfield's Goshawk (*Accipiter soloensis*) was sighted by us on 24 March 1987 in Simlipal Tiger Reserve, Orissa. The bird was seen circling above the thick semi-evergreen forest near the check-post of the core area near the Chahala rest house. Three more individuals of the same species were seen during the next four days in different parts of the reserve. One of the birds was sighted near the Chahala rest house on a dead tree and was probably hunting. Another bird was sighted near upper Barakamara rest house, flying over a forest clearing. The third was sighted about 40 km outside the tiger reserve near Jasmipur forest rest house circling and constantly calling "ti- tui", quite like a shikra.

The bird was identified by its smaller-than-shikra size, white underparts with pinkish tinge on the abdomen, upper breast and underwing coverts. The underparts were unbarred. The tip of the primaries were black. The sides of the head and neck were very pale.

Horsfield's Goshawk has not so far been recorded from the Indian mainland. Ali and Ripley (1983) described its range as "uncertain, common (winter?) on Katchal Island and Great and Little Nicobar Is. (Abbott and Boden Kloss). Andaman Is."

Our sight record is probably the first proof that this species occurs in mainland India also.

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April 29, 1987.

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9. RINGTAILED FISHING EAGLE FEEDING ON WASP LARVAE

On 25 September 1986, in the Keoladeo Ghana National Park, Bharatpur, I saw a Ringtailed Fishing Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*) sitting on a *Prosopis spicigera* tree-top near the aquatic area holding an unidentified object in its claws. I moved closer without disturbing the bird and saw that it was holding part of the nest of a paper wasp (*Polistes hebaeus*, Family : Vespidae). It was holding the nest firmly in its claws and feeding from the chambers. The Ringtailed Fishing Eagle is known to feed on birds,

reptiles and fishes (Ali and Ripley 1983), and this observation of feeding on paper wasp larvae seems to be noteworthy, as it has not been recorded in the past.

This unusual food may have had something to do with the delayed arrival of migratory waterfowl as well as the unsuccessful nesting in the heronry in 1986.

November 3, 1986.

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10. RANGE EXTENSION OF EURASIAN GRIFFON VULTURE *GYPS FULVUS*

The northeastern distributional range of the Fulvous or Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* within India has been given by Ali and Ripley (1978) as "straggling east to Western Assam. Gauntlet (1985) records it in Damodar Valley in West Bengal. Grubb (1986) mentions it as occurring in northeastern India without giving details

of the location of the find.

However, we had an excellent opportunity to see this bird repeatedly over a period of 2 months from November to December 1985 in Tezpur (Assam) and again between 14 and 17 January 1986 in Dibrugarh which is almost the north-easternmost limit of Assam.

We saw only upto three birds together at any time. They were all in immature plumage, the ruff being brown, and were seen in a mixed flock of *G. indicus* and *G. bengalensis*, actively feeding at cattle carcasses or sitting on

trees near the feeding sites.

February 17, 1986.

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11. OCCURRENCE OF REDBREASTED FALCONET *MICROHIERAX CAERULESCENS* (LINNE) IN THE SIMLIPAL TIGER RESERVE, ORISSA

A Redbreasted Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens* (Linnaeus) was sighted by us in the Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa on 25 March 1987 at about 0700 hours. The bird was seen perched about 12 m high on a dead branch of a tree near a perennial stream close to the rest house in Upper Barakamara. The bird was readily identified by its diminutive size, broad white collar on the hind neck and a prominent black band through the eye.

The Redbreasted Falconet is not recorded earlier

from Orissa. According to Ali and Ripley (1983) the species is present in the Himalayan foothills and terai from Kumaon in Uttar Pradesh to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Assam. The westernmost record is from Nainital (79° 26' E) and the southernmost record from Sultanpur (26° 15' N). The Simlipal Tiger Reserve is quite south of the known range of this species.

March 31, 1987

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REFERENCE S

ALI, S. & RIPLEY, S.D. (1983): The Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan. (Compact edition), Oxford University

Press, Delhi.

12. MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF DEMOISELLE CRANES (*ANTHROPOIDES VIRGO*) AT VEER DAM

I have been studying the Demoiselle Cranes (*Anthropoides virgo*) for the last four years at Veer Dam Lake, situated 65 km from Pune on the Satara Road. Since 1984 the Demoiselle Cranes have been very regular visitors to this lake. The birds start arriving in small flocks of a few hundreds from the middle of November and their number is fairly large by January. They leave by the end of March. Every year about 2000 cranes settle here; but this year over 7000 arrived at Veer Dam. This sudden rise in numbers could be due to drought and drying up of the lakes in the north and more severe winters in the north.

The banks of the Veer Dam lake slope gradually towards the water, and are submerged in the rainy season. As the water level recedes the farmers from the neighbouring village start cultivating crops within the area. The cranes, on arrival at Veer, feed on the sprouting shoots of maize, wheat and gram, which are the chief crops of this area. Later, during February and March, the cranes feed on seeds of jowar, wheat and gram.

The farmers use different methods in order to protect their crops from the cranes, such as putting

scarecrows in the field, trying to drive away the flock by shouting, throwing stones, waving towels and recently by detonating firecrackers. Sometimes the cranes were shot at but it was usually by outsiders, as the local people have no guns. But all these methods of protecting the crops are possible only during the day; since the cranes also feed in the fields at night, the damage to crops continues.

The number of cranes this year was large; consequently, so was the extent of crop damage. I was astonished this year, during my visit on 5 March 1987, to see ten dead Demoiselle Cranes. It was surprising that the cranes had not been carried away and eaten by the villagers. Some cranes were in a half-eaten state, and in a nearby area I found a dead kite and a dead Marsh Harrier.

I went to the neighbouring village and asked a few people there as to what could be the cause of death of these cranes. They said they did not know. However, there were small boys, around the 12 to 14 years old, who said that, during the last two days, a few cranes were seen with froth coming from their beaks, and that the deaths were due to ingestion of poison.